

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER SQUARE,

ON SUNDAY, OCT. 19, 1851.

BEING THE SUNDAY AFTER THE CLOSING OF THE
GREAT EXHIBITION
OF THE INDUSTRY OF ALL NATIONS.

BY

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RECTOR.



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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JAMES WALTER,

EARL OF VERULAM,

TO WHOSE EARNEST DESIRE OF EXTENDING ITS USEFULNESS

THIS DISCOURSE OWES ITS PUBLICATION,

It is inscribed,

WITH

SENTIMENTS OF THE DEEPEST RESPECT AND ESTEEM,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S VERY FAITHFUL SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORDS

EARL OF ARUNDEL

AND OTHERS

IN PARLIAMENT

ASSEMBLED

IN

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

IN THE YEAR 1701

THE ACT

SERMON.

ACTS, VII. 50.

Hath not my hand made all these things?

THE past week has terminated, if not the grandest, yet certainly one of the grandest combined displays of human industry and skill, which the world ever beheld. For many months it has been the admiration of an unceasing concourse of spectators, unequalled, perhaps, in point of numbers, and unparalleled for diversity of country and condition of life, and the distances which they traversed to behold it. Wherever the eye turned, there were the proofs of genius and manual skill, splendour and utility; everything that Man, the great artificer on earth, as he has been called, hath invented for the comfort and enjoyment, the use and ornament of life. Wonderful it was to look upon, and well calculated to inspire high thoughts of man's capacity for future progress in knowledge

and in art. When we contemplated his handling of the raw materials of Nature, with which he finds himself surrounded; and the infinity of beautiful and useful shapes into which they were wrought up; or when we mused upon the power which he has acquired over the most energetic, and, at the same time, most subtle of physical agents; making them his servants, and bending them to his purpose for a thousand beneficial results; did we not feel as if it were impossible to set limits to his inventive skill, and as if the inconceivable greatness of his future works would obliterate the wonder of those which we were then beholding?

These reflections, no doubt, are as just as they were obvious on the contemplation of so magnificent a scene. But shall they be all that we have to make upon it? Should it lead us no higher than to the probable advances which mankind is yet to make in science and in art? Ought we to see no further than the mere human artificer, and from thence to cherish pride in the species to which we belong? Or ought we not to remember Him, who, among His wonderful works, claims Man, this very artificer himself; and saith, in language as sublime as it is just, "Hath not my hand made all these things?"

When we argue upon the greatness of the wisdom and the power of God from His works of creation, of which Man himself is one, we lead you through familiar and beaten ground. We remind you of truths which you readily recognise, when we say,

that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. The earth also is full of His riches."*

But it is not quite so obvious to pass on to the power and wisdom of God from contemplating the handywork of His creature, Man. In the one case, the glorious creations which we behold lead us at once to the chief Artificer. We "look through Nature up to Nature's God." But in the other, we are checked by the presence of the subordinate workman, whose productions lie before us; and our admiration and astonishment are apt to rest on him, until we reflect, that he himself is a work of art, more wonderful than any which he produces. We have to ask ourselves, "Whence came the master-mind which conceived, and who formed the delicate structure of the hand which executed, these works? And then we remember the Grand Artificer of all, and that it is "He that teacheth man knowledge."†

This, brethren, is the train of meditation into which I am willing to lead you at this time, as involving some of the most permanently useful impressions which the recent gorgeous spectacle can leave behind it. Let us, in a word, endeavour to see God in the midst of that multiform collection of human art; and to think of Man, as destined by Him, to an eternity of progress, both in knowledge and power, compared with which he can be

* Ps. xix. 1, 2; civ. 24.

† Ps. xciv. 10.

said at present only "to speak as a child, to understand as a child, and to think as a child."*

Are we, then, astonished at the power which the mind of man has acquired over the materials of Nature which surround him? Let us imagine, if we can, what that Intelligence must be, which knows perfectly all that can result, either from the infinite combinations of matter, or the various modifications of Mind itself. For what is that which we call matter, or body? It is a substance, divisible into parts, and susceptible of endless combinations; out of which may arise as many different bodies as there can be diversities in the arrangement of their parts. One example will serve instead of many. Cast the grain of wheat into the ground; let it be warmed with the rays of the genial sun; and that grain will become an ear, laden with many others, similar to that one which produced them. Again, give the parts of these grains an arrangement different from that which they had in the ear; separate the finer from the coarser, mingling a few drops of the element of water, and submit the whole to the element of heat, and you have produced bread, the staff of life. Yet again, let that bread be food; and by a further transmutation of its parts it will become flesh, and bone, and blood, and sinew; all the constituent elements of that body of man which is, indeed, "fearfully and wonderfully made."† And the same observation which we apply to

* 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

† Ps. cxxxix. 14.

the grain of wheat, is applicable to the wedge of gold, or to the piece of clay. Here is the foundation of that multitude of arts in society which mankind have invented, by their ever-widening knowledge of the different arrangements of which matter is susceptible. But there is this difference : Mankind perceives, as it were, only one point of matter ; a point placed between two infinities—an infinitely great and an infinitely small. Those enormous bodies, of a few of which only we catch a feeble glimpse, we call the infinitely great—those distant suns, that endless crowd of worlds in the immensity of space, to us imperceptible for the most part, but of the existence of which we are perfectly assured. On the other hand, the infinitely small are those minutest molecules of matter, which are too fine and subtle to be subjected to our experiments ; and which seem to us to have no bulk, only because our senses are too gross to discern them ; but which, at the same time, are the habitation of an infinite number of organised and living creatures.

If, then, the knowledge which Man has attained of one limited portion of matter, and of a few only of the countless combinations of which it is susceptible, has produced such a number of arts, which improve and adorn society ; what would follow if he were enabled to penetrate the secrets of *all* matter ? What would ensue upon our knowledge of those other bodies which absorb our capacities by their greatness, or baffle our investigations by

their minuteness? What if we could obtain adequate ideas of the various possible combinations of the parts of bodies, too great, or too small, to be understood by us? What new discoveries! What new arts! What an inexhaustible source of new provisions for man's use, or his enjoyment! But this *is* the knowledge of the Supreme. He knows as perfectly the infinitely great and the infinitely small, as He knows that portion of matter between both which furnishes the objects of human science. He knows perfectly what must result from every possible combination of all the elements of all existing matter; because He it is who saith—and only He—"Hath not my hand made all these things?"

And more than this: He is "the God of the spirits of all flesh."* He knows all spiritual as perfectly as He knows all material substance. If His wisdom extends to all that can result from the diversified arrangements of the one, so does He discern every effect which can be produced by the minutest modifications of the other. He fathoms the depth of the intellectual no less thoroughly than those of the material world. He penetrates the conceptions of our minds and the passions of our hearts, all our purposes and all our powers. Wheresoever genius is manifested, there is God. Wheresoever invention is at work, He is there. Not to discern Him in all the workings of the mind

* Num. xvi. 22; xxvii. 16.

of man is to be blind without excuse. Not to acknowledge Him in all the wonderful *products* of human industry and skill, is to be "without God in the world."* If we carry our thoughts back to those periods in eternity, when the perfect Being existed alone; (for sound reason teaches that He must have so existed, since nothing besides Himself is eternal); what could have been the rule or model of all beings which exist by Him, if not the ideas of His own infinite Mind? Or what could cause such beings, when they had, as yet, only an ideal existence in the mind of God, to have an actual existence out of it, if not the efficiency of His omnipotent will? "Hath not my hand made all these things?" Hence it is, that He knows how to make all beings the instruments of His designs. It is for this reason that all works of intellectual power and skill reflect His creative wisdom. The ten thousand times ten thousand intelligences, some of whom are superior, while there may be others inferior to ourselves, are all by this means only little imitators of *His* workmanship, whose ideas are the original models of the attributes of His creatures, as His will is the sole efficient cause of their existence.†

As the eye wandered over that matchless display of human industry and ingenuity, surveying

* Eph. ii. 12.

† Some portion of the above reflections has been suggested by a discourse of the celebrated French Protestant Divine, M. Saurin, "On the Wisdom and the Power of God."

here the infinitely diversified and splendid fabrics of the loom, and there the breathing beauty of the sculptured marble ; on this side, the exquisite productions of the workers in gold, and silver, and glass, and porcelain ; and on that, the powers of mechanism put forth in every form and for every purpose ; and, more wonderful perhaps than all, the invisible electric current, applied with almost miraculous ingenuity to the most important uses of life :—as the eye wandered over all this, what work of art did it there behold that is half so amazing as the artificer himself ? What pen could describe him, or catalogue the miracles of skill shown forth in every part of his bodily and mental frame ? Take but a single portion, by way of brief illustration : those organs of sense by which he holds communion with all external things ; how, for example, the eye itself, consisting of fluids inclosed within coats, shows us all the graces and glories of surrounding Nature ; so tender, that the slightest touch might injure its delicate frame, but therefore guarded with peculiar care ; entrenched deep and barricaded with bony fences, and protected outwardly by those substantial curtains which fly together as quick as thought, excluding the smallest mote that might rudely smite its polished surface, and also moderating the too powerful impressions of the light by which it sees. How wonderful that an image of the hugest mountains and the widest landscapes should enter that diminutive pupil ; and that the rays of light should paint there

in an instant of time, and in their truest colours and exactest lineaments, every species of external objects !

Or, consider the no less exquisite mechanism of the human ear, composed of its outward porch and interior apartments ; the former wrought into sinuous cavities, which, like circling hills, collect the wandering undulations of the air, and with a vigorous impulse transmit them inward to the finely-stretched membrane of the drum. And with what exquisite art is this expanded over a polished reverberating cavity, and furnished with braces that strain or relax themselves, as the sound is faint or strong ! And the hammer, and the anvil, and the winding labyrinth, and the sounding galleries, all instrumental to the process of hearing—how curiously are they wrought, and how skilfully adapted to the office which they have to perform ! Amazingly exact must be the tension of the auditory nerves, answering, as they do, to the smallest tremors of the atmosphere, and discriminating their most subtle variations. These living chords, tuned by an Almighty hand, and diffused through the echoing aisles, receive every impression of sound, and propagate it to the central brain. These give birth to all the charms of music, and the still more captivating melody of sweet and eloquent discourse.

In the hand of man we behold a collection of the very finest instruments. This is the original and universal sceptre which marks and secures his

dominion over all the creatures. Though he has not the gigantic strength of some, nor the surpassing swiftness of others, nor the quick senses of many; yet, directed by reason, and enabled by the hand, he can, as it were, make them all his own. This shortest of instruments has found a way to penetrate the bowels of the earth, and to explore the bottom of the sea. This feeblest of instruments can manage the wings of the wind, and arm itself with the tremendous energies of fire and water. By the skilful use of this little instrument the tallest firs, the mightiest oaks, fall prostrate; and, fashioned by the hand, become a floating emporium of every kind of merchandise, to transport the countless productions, both of Art and Nature, from the one end of heaven to the other.

And so we might proceed with this inimitable work of art, not knowing which most to admire; the multitude of organs, their finished form and faultless order, or the power which the invisible tenant of this wondrous structure exerts over every one of them. Into her hands are put ten thousand reins, which she guides without the least perplexity or irregularity; nay, rather, with a promptitude, a consistency, and a speed, that nothing else can equal.

But are not these the very instruments by which man executes his noblest works? Without these, what power would he possess to produce any single work of industry or art? When we cast our eyes, therefore, over the gratifying spectacle of human

genius and skill, and say within ourselves, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth;"* can we, or ought we to forget to ask ourselves, "Who made the maker?" Must there not be something awfully corrupt in that mind which cannot discern Him, "the Great, the Mighty God;" whose Name, as the prophet sublimely saith, is "the Lord of Hosts, great in counsel, and mighty in work; for Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men?"†

But it is time we pass on to our further reflections on the destiny of this subordinate artificer, Man. For while we remind ourselves that all his powers are only derived, we must admit that they are grand; and can we help asking ourselves the deeply interesting question, For what end are they given to man? Are such abilities made for no purpose? Can we believe that a thinking being, whom we perceive to be in a perpetual progress of improvement, and travelling on from knowledge to knowledge, and from one discovery to another, after having just looked abroad into the works of his Creator, and made a few discoveries of His infinite goodness, power, and wisdom, must perish at his first setting out, and on the very threshold of his inquiries? The brute creature, we perceive, soon arrives at a point of perfection which he is never able to pass. In a few years he has all the endowments of which he is capable; and were he to live

* Deut. viii. 17.

† Jer. xxxii. 18, 19.

ten thousand more, would be the same that he is at present. But Man seems never to have taken in his full measure of knowledge in this life. He has not time to come nearly up to the perfection of his nature, before he is hurried off the stage. But would an infinitely wise Being have made such creatures for so mean a purpose? Can He delight in the production of such "abortive intelligences," such short-lived reasonable beings? Would He give such talents to be exerted in so brief a space; such capacities to be no further filled? How shall we discover in the formation of man that wisdom which is so conspicuous in all His other works, without looking on this present world only as a nursery for another; and believing that the generations of mankind, which rise up and disappear in such quick succession, are only to receive their first rudiments of knowledge here, and afterwards to be transplanted into a more perfect state, where they may grow and flourish throughout eternity?

Can there be a more pleasing, or a more triumphant consideration in religion, than this perpetual progress which the human nature is destined to make towards its own perfection without ever arriving at a period in it? To look upon man as going on from strength to strength, and to reflect that he is to shine with new accessions of glory, and to brighten onward to all eternity; that he will still be adding virtue to virtue, and knowledge to knowledge; does not this carry in it something that is wonderfully in harmony with that "longing

after immortality" which is so natural to him? And may we not well believe that it must be a prospect well-pleasing to the great Creator Himself, to behold this noblest part of His creation for ever beautifying in His eyes, and drawing nearer and nearer to Him by closer degrees of resemblance? With what astonishment, yea, rather, with what veneration, may we look into ourselves, where there are such hidden stores of virtue and knowledge, such inexhausted elements of perfection! We know not yet what we shall be; nor, perhaps, will it ever enter into the heart of man to conceive the glory that will be always in reserve for him. "The soul, considered with its Creator, is like one of those mathematical lines that may draw nearer to another for all eternity without a possibility of contact. And can there be a thought so transporting as to consider ourselves in these perpetual approaches to Him who is the standard, not only of all perfection, but also of all happiness?"*

That this, brethren, is our destiny, if we desire it to be so, it is the very purpose of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to assure us. When Christ saith, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me:"† does

* The reader who, in this teeming age of new books, finds leisure to look back to such writers as Addison, Paley, Ferguson, and, more recently, the Authors of the "Bridgewater Treatises," may study at the fountain-head those arguments and illustrations, a very few of which are here thrown together.

† John, xiv. 6.

He not inform us that we *are* to come to the Father, and that a way is opened to us for that blessed consummation of our being? But (and let us never overlook this momentous truth), it is the *only* way. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"* is the only path to that perfection of which we have been discoursing; the only key of that temple of universal science in a future world, of which we know only the rudiments, albeit the glorious rudiments, in this. "For this," saith the beloved Apostle, "is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."† If this be true, it is vain to believe in God only as the Deist and the deistical professor of revealed religion believe in Him. It is vain to meditate on the works either of God or Man, if it leads you to no better creed than theirs. It is vain to anticipate that eternal growth of knowledge and happiness after death, if you do not know that Son of God, whose atoning and cleansing blood alone can make you "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."‡

Let us trust, then, that among the mere secular fruits and hopes of that world-famed spectacle, which has just passed away, some impulse may have been given to the faith of Jesus Christ,

* John, ix. 35.

† 1 John, v. 9, 11, 12.

‡ Col. i. 12.

and to the advancement of His kingdom upon earth: that, while in this peaceful gathering of nations, we have been led to recognise the Divine power and wisdom in the achievements of man's industry and skill; many (to adopt the language of its concluding supplication at the throne of grace) "may depart to their several homes to speak in their own tongues the wonderful works of God:" that, as "the token and pledge of a continued intercourse of mutual kindness between the different branches of the human family, it may contribute to the growth of universal love; and hasten the coming of that blessed reign of peace, when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'"

* Isa. ii. 4, and Micah, iv. 3.

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— 1st. 2d. and 3d. 1872.